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SUBJECT: DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER DISCUSSES OGADEN RELIEF AND
DEVELOPMENT

SUMMARY

¶1. (SBU) Deputy Prime Minister Adissu Legesse told Ambassador, UN Res Rep Sarasorro, and USAID Mission Director Anders in a meeting on September 25 that the government was taking an "integrated" approach in the Somali region of Ethiopia, similar to the UN-USAID "two track" approach of humanitarian relief (the "hub and spoke," NGO grants, training, pastoral programs, etc.) in conjunction with recovery and transition process to help promote agricultural and economic development. He noted the focal role of the new State Minister and his chairing of the joint Special Committee for Somali region. Due to lack of capacity at the local government level, the Federal Government will play a larger role, with donor assistance, in promoting health care, education, water supply, and agro-pastoral development, the four priorities for the Ogaden region. While the number of food aid beneficiaries has now been raised to 6.4 million (based on the joint assessment), including 1.98 million in the Ogaden, the Deputy Prime Minister expressed hope that food aid needs will decrease with the rains. While NGOs have reported good access to many parts of the Somali region, insecurity remains a problem and, with the recent kidnapping of two foreign aid workers in the Ogaden, there is a fear of increasing extremist activities hampering food distribution and other aid. Adissu remarked that ultimately it is up to the elders and clan leaders in the Somali region of Ethiopia and their commitment and support of development to bring peace to the region and that military action by Ethiopian forces is not a solution. End Summary.

FOCUS IS ON DEVELOPMENT IN THE OGADEN

¶2. (U) The regular joint UN-US dialogue with the government on food security, food distribution, development and the Ogaden was conducted September 25. Deputy Prime Minister Adissu Legesse noted to UN Res Rep Fidele Sarasorro, USAID Director Glenn Anders and Ambassador that the joint UN-USAID "hub and spoke" plan for food distribution in the Ogaden/Somali region of Ethiopia would soon be operational and should facilitate greater food deliveries. (Note: 2,900 mt of the anticipated 35,000 mt of relief food was delivered last month. Under the "hub and spoke" system, large trucks will take the food from Djibouti to designated centers in the Somali region of Ethiopia where smaller trucks will deliver the food to beneficiaries. End Note.) Adissu also remarked that the dissolution of the Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Agency (DPPA, Ethiopia's emergency disaster agency), in favor of the establishment of a food security and disaster response organization to oversee deliveries under a new state minister for agriculture will improve efficiencies. Further, the newly formed donor-GoE-NGO Special Committee coordinating group on the Somali region will be more effective under the new State Minister's leadership.

¶3. (U) Sarasorro raised the UN-USAID concept of a two pronged

approach to the Ogaden region of pursuing humanitarian relief in conjunction with promoting longer-term economic development through "recovery" and "transition" process. The UN and USAID can provide experts and focus assistance on helping pastoralists recover as well as promote agricultural development which will help communities better survive droughts. Adissu noted the GoE's pilot project in 22 woredas in the Ogaden region which stresses the four priorities -- health care, education, water supply, and agro-pastoral development.

This success will be expanded throughout the Somali region. Sarasoro and Anders made clear their commitment to be a part of the development strategy for the Somali region. Adissu replied that discussions are taking place within the government and that he would approach the UN and USAID within the next two weeks on coordination and partnership efforts in this area.

BENEFICIARIES -- HOW MANY?

¶4. (U) The Ambassador raised the requests by Somali regional government officials to formally increase the number of beneficiaries, the need for capacity development, and expanded support from the federal government. Adissu replied that the Special Committee on the Somali region made up of officials from the region and officials from various ministries have agreed on the higher beneficiary number of 1.98 million posed by the Somali region government. Further, the government raised the total number of beneficiaries in Ethiopia from 4.8 million, announced in June, to 6.4 million. Questioned on whether this number was too low, Adissu replied that, due to rains and crop production, he felt the number of beneficiaries is declining and that food deliveries are improving. The concern, as the USAID director noted, is the

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forecast of poor October rains in the pastoral regions which could affect the number of beneficiaries. Adissu admitted that there are pockets of severe malnutrition throughout the country. Still, he noted that promoting the government's integrated approach or four priorities of education, health care, water projects and agricultural development, will help enable the country to cope with the constant cycles of drought.

PLAYING A BIGGER ROLE IN THE OGADEN

¶5. (U) Adissu said that due to the lack of capacity within the Somali regional and local governments the federal government will take a greater role in running the region's development program. This did not mean complete control or full management of the region's affairs, but lending experts and working closely with the regional government on development projects and food distribution. Adissu stated that his intent is to find ways to help the Somali region develop expertise and capacity to enable the federal government to step back in the near future to allow the local government to run its operations.

SECURITY A MAJOR CHALLENGE

¶6. (U) The group agreed that insecurity remains a difficult challenge. Extremists' detentions of aid workers just after the Ambassador and USAID director visited the Ogaden last week and the kidnapping of two foreign aid workers by an unknown group operating out of Somalia this week raised concerns over security. Sarasoro and the Ambassador noted reports from NGOs in the Ogaden that there were fewer restrictions on travel, but asked whether security issues will change this condition. Adissu speculated that the insecurity is limited to only a couple of places, outside of Jijiga, Fik, Degahabur, and Warder towns. He believed that the current openness in most parts of the Ogaden will continue.

¶7. (U) Adissu concluded the meeting by expressing frustration over press reports of human rights abuse and restrictions by the Ethiopian government in the Ogaden region. He noted the openness reported by the NGOs there and the expansion to over 20 NGOs operating in the region. The group remarked to Adissu on the need for the government to address the concerns raised by the NGOs and

other groups as well as to inform, through possible regular press conferences on how the Ethiopian Government is correcting problems, addressing needs, and correcting possible misinformation.

COMMENT

¶8. (SBU) These UN-US joint meetings with the Deputy Prime Minister have helped raise more effectively in a smaller forum the concerns over food deliveries, NGO access, development questions and human rights issues on behalf of the donor, international, and NGO communities. The UN-US joint approach has led to the establishment of the joint Special Committee for the Somali region as a forum for NGO's, donors and the government. Frustrations remain and responses are slow, as displayed by the three month delay in the government's agreement to implement the "hub and spoke" food delivery approach, but Adissu, who has not often met with donor groups, has readily met with the UN-US group. The security situation is a growing concern to the donor group and while the NGOs have reported fewer human rights abuses by the Ethiopian military recently, it likely is due in large part to the lack of fighting in the region. The unprecedented kidnapping of foreign aid workers is an alarming sign and could signal a resumption of fighting by insurgents and extremists from Somalia which would lead to a rapid response from the Ethiopian security forces. We will continue to work closely with the Deputy Prime Minister and our own private meetings with the Prime Minister and other members of the ruling party's central committee to inform and influence the situation in the Somali Region and other parts of Ethiopia. End Comment.

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